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ABSTRACT

A content analysis was performed on all of the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) Nine O'Clock News and ITV (Independent Television) News at Ten programs that were broadcast during Britain's year-long miners' strike--March 1984-March 1985--and a four-month sample of Channel 4 news to examine how television news covered a protracted story of industrial relations gone wrong. Three surveys were also conducted to ask the public their opinions on various aspects of the strike and its coverage by television news. These data were then analyzed to test hypotheses about balance, agenda setting, audience perception of the issues, adequacy of the coverage, and other research questions. Patterns that emerged from the data analyses led to the following conclusions: (1) the news emphasized the conduct of the strike rather than the causes of the dispute; (2) concerns that the media set the agenda for public perceptions of issues are not supported by the data; (3) there was little consensus on what issues had been underplayed on television news; (4) results of content analysis and the public opinion surveys support the notion that balance was usually achieved; (5) the review of current affairs and documentaries shows that deficiencies in the news were compensated for by other programs; and (6) bias is as much a characteristic of the viewer as an inherent feature of the news. The long-term consequences of the strike were identified by actors and commentators alike as being entirely negative, and their view was shared by the general public. (CGD)

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TELEVISION NEWS AND THE MINERS' STRIKE

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Introduction

One point on which media researchers and television news journalists should agree is the need to strive for impartiality and objectivity in their various endeavours. Unlike newspapers, British television and radio are required (under the regulations of the BBC and IBA) to renounce a partisian editorial stance in favour of "impartiality". The upper echelons of the British Broadcasting Corporation and the Independent Broadcasting Authority publicly pronounce that they are neutral and committed to balance. Although the regulations applying to the two companies are different - the Broadcasting Act 1981 replaced the IBA Act 1973 and applied only to the IBA requiring them to ensure "a proper balance" and "due impartiality" However, formally the BBC has accepted to follow these obligations under its new charter granted in 1981.

The principal problem for any attempt to assess "a proper balance" or "due imparitality" lies in forming an account of reality which is concrete, reliable and independent of the media itself. If it were possible to achieve such an account then news bias would be very easy to assess. However, once we move away from any event as presented on television to search for a reality we are beset by a number of competing stories as to what 'really happened'. Most of these accounts seem to hold their claims on a basis of personal authority - "I was there, I saw it happen". While not wishing to devalue accounts of personal experience or to minimise the task of a news production team in attempting to discern the meaning and importance of all these competing versions, the deceptive smoothness of the news bulletin may create the impression that it transparently reflects what 'really happened'.

There are various other problems with the concept of balance. How does the journalist 'balance' coverage when one side has better public relations

advisers than the other or when some interests are difficult to track down or are represented by bumbling, inarticulate speakers who need prompting? In this context, the job of a television news journalist is daunting. All the more so for the question of whether television news should reflect a monolithic majority view point, a consensus, or should share its contents according to the various audiences and communities of interest. At present the main news broadcasts seem to aim at consensus.

As a former BBC Director General said, television is biased towards parliamentary democracy with a two-party, or at most three-party system. Thus arguments have to be balanced with counter-arguments. In the case of industrial disputes, management spokesman replying to union representatives is the most common and convenient. The problem for the journalist arises when satellite figures are interviewed. In the case of the (1984/85) miners' strike the coal board was balanced against the miners' union, while government figures replied to opposition, but who "balances" the clergyman, the police spokesman, or the shop owner in a mining village? Moreover can they all be fitted in to a news programme with time and financial constraints? When attempting to cover a whole constellation of opinions, it may take more time than the main evening news to wait for the bias to balance. After all the world is far larger than a television screen and the events in it every day greater than can be covered in thirty minutes. Of course this is where television current affairs and documentary programmes are supposed to "flesh out" the bare bones of news programmes. As Alan Protheroe, Assistant Director-General of the BBC, suggested:

"our news is intended as immediate coverage of issues of the day: our current affairs output complements the news coverage by offering the kind of background explanation and analysis that is impossible within the time constraints of brief news bulletins and summaries".
(Guardian letters 2.3.84)

Of course current affairs programmes and documentaries do perform this function. They examine issues that news programmes do not cover in much depth (such as the economics of coal production, the effects on mining communities, and the role of women in the strike). However, far fewer people watch documentaries, either because they are not interested in them or because, as the President of the National Union of Mineworkers, Mr Scargill, once said, "they are too busy or too tired to catch more than the headlines". Thus while some consideration will be given to current affairs and documentaries, the focus of this research is on the major news bulletins of the BBC and ITN.

The Miners' Strike

The year long miners' strike (March 1984 - March 1985) provided a unique opportunity in media research to examine how television news covered a protracted story of industrial relations gone sour. This strike received more news coverage in Britain than any other event since World War II and provided us with a generous data base to test hypotheses about balance, agenda setting and sundry other research questions. Whatever the final judgement is about news bias, the nature of media coverage of the miners strike is just one of many important issues which the dispute raised.

Of course any strike affecting one of the basic industries is hardly likely to be viewed as unimportant. The prospect of the coal industry grinding to a

halt in the face of antagonism between the present government and the trade unions generated feelings very early in the dispute that the struggle would be extended beyond the specifics of an industrial dispute to the realm of a political battle. The strike would have been intrinsically news worthy, but the context of the setting, bringing to the surface social issues and tensions in society, provided the media with not one, but a whole host of stories. At times minor actors became major players, and issues thrown up in the course of the dispute overwhelmed and confused the initial plot. For example, the national coordination of regional police forces and the use of road blocks to prevent movement of pickets (and even television crews), although essentially secondary to the main story, involved issues - the rule of law and civil liberties - which could touch the lives of everyone. Hence what were essentially 'epiphenomena' to the dispute itself fuelled major news discussion. Consequently, the manner in which television presented the miners' dispute draws importance from a variety of sources not simply as a continuous record of a strike, nor simply as the way the mass media views society. For some people television news is the way in which a society publicly views itself and is a window on the values beliefs and concerns of the general public.

One of the important points to emerge from our research is that despite television being overwhelmingly the major source of news for the general public, audience perceptions of the news and as to what the strike was all about differed considerably. In other words while the public may have all watched the same news they didn't all see it in the same way. More than this there is some evidence that the news coverage of the strike was in itself something that did more than reflect the tensions and disagreements between different groups in society. In some ways it aggravated them.

The Present Research

One of the major problems with many of the content analyses which have been performed hitherto is that their authors have attempted to make highly ambitious inferences from news content data, such as trying to prove the effects of television on its audience, or to demonstrate the biases of news personnel which such data cannot do in itself. Causal links between television content and behaviour or attitudes are notoriously difficult, if not impossible, to show. The universe of other possible reasons for any association is just too large to identify and control. For example content analysis may indicate that Conservative, Alliance, or Labour themes are heavily played, or that certain participants feature prominently in the news, but it cannot demonstrate that the personal political leanings of broadcast journalists are responsible for this. Other factors such as the obtrusiveness of vocal spokespersons, or groups, may account for the phenomena. More appropriate research methods, such as participant observation, are essential to determine the part that values, motives and organisational variables play in the production of television news.

While the news has often been studied using content analysis alone, the essential limitations of this method are such that it can allow us only to answer questions about the priorities or agenda of news coverage, and about the nature or depiction of events in the news. The more meaty, theoretical issue - of whether news broadcasts set the agenda of issues for the public, or define their perceptions of them - cannot be addressed just by content analysis. Moreover the investigation of news bias, which in one sense can be addressed solely via news content, is made more complete when aspects of news coverage can be linked to public perceptions of bias. Therefore, our approach was two-fold: to analyse the content of the news and to examine the constellation of public attitudes to it.

In our content analysis we took all of the BBC Nine O'Clock News and ITN News at Ten broadcast about the miners' strike (from 2nd March 1984 until 3rd March 1985) plus a 4 month sample of Channel 4 news and systematically recorded all the issues raised and the ways in which 'actors' were presented in connection with the miners' strike. The list of issues grew to more than three hundred clearly distinct categories which we were fortunately able to reduce into something more manageable for presentation here. We also asked the public a series of questions about their opinions on various aspects of the strike such as the most important issues they thought it raised, whether the TV news coverage was balanced and so on. These opinions were measured in three surveys.

The fieldwork for the first survey on 17th August 1984 (N = 1079) was carried out for us nationally by NOP, who for the second survey reinterviewed a random sample of 245 from the original survey, during the 8th to 11th March 1985. The third survey was of 147 people in the village of Allerton Bywater, a West Yorkshire mining community near Castleford, about ten miles from Leeds. This was carried out between 15th and 21st December 1984.

By way of summary the bulk of our study consists of a content analysis of television news broadcasts attempting to combine traditionally 'hard' types of category, such as time given to particular people in the dispute, with some 'soft' categories which enable us to discern some of the niceties of how they were treated. In analysing all broadcasts we have retained as much detail as practicable of the news material. Despite our desire for quantitative analysis, this is quite possible, since there is nothing in the rubric of content analysis to insist that it must be as arid and insensitive a technique as it is sometimes considered to be.

Whatever the value of content analysis and our research commitment to it, the relationship between news content and people's perceptions of that content is, we believe, crucial. We considered that the best way to arrive at meaningful conclusions about the concept of balance was to ask people about the coverage of the strike and the issues that it raised and compare these perceptions with similar categories in our content analysis. After all a content analysis coding schedule and a questionnaire are very much the same kind of research instrument.

Some further explanation may now be offered of our various measures. Content analysis while naturally involving "watching" the news is of course rather different from every day "watching". The coding procedure used to record our "watching" was designed to satisfy our criteria of validity and reliability. Thus in order to minimise the effect of any predispositions of coders we employed as many as possible (fourteen over the twelve months), and carried out regular detailed training sessions, along with discussion groups during the development of the coding schedule. Additionally, randomly chosen bulletins were coded more than once in order to compute reliability across coders. This allowed us to confirm that different people coding the same material obtained the same results in a high proportion of cases. We can, therefore place a high degree of confidence in our results and maintain that they are not the product of biased samples of either the news or our coders or the public.

FINDINGS

The Issues in the Strike

The richness of the strike as a media story was itself remarkable, but the wider arena of public debate was, if anything even richer and more multifarious as issues were raised and became part of the public record without being fully aired on television.

In our content analysis we identified the issues raised in the news in as much detail as possible. In total over the 2,368 minutes of miners' strike news recorded we identified over 300 separate issues which were raised 12,798 times by 219 different actors on 3,437 distinct occasions. However, for most of this discussion we have grouped these issues into larger categories to aid interpretation. To take a simple example, if a newscaster said "Talks broke down today over the issue of uneconomic pits", this statement would end up contributing to our large categories of "talks and negotiations" and "economics of coal production". Coding was not always so simple. Consider the following quote:

> "Gerald Kaufman accepted that people must have the right to go to work but peaceful picketing he said was also a civil right and police were losing public confidence with such tactics as using plain clothes police on the picket lines and stopping travellers miles from their destinations".
> ITN News at Ten 10.4.84

The large categories to which this would eventually contribute would be "picketing generally", "civil rights" and "police tactics", having been initially coded in a more detailed manner. We have not allowed our broad

categories to completely mask the detail of newsbroadcasts however, since we can still distinguish between the narrower categories within them. For example, "civil rights" contains, among other things, "right to work", "right to strike" and "right to picket".

For the present discussion we took only those broad categories of issues which comprised more than 1% of the total. Together these 14 groups account for 71% of all the issues raised.

No one issue predominated in the coverage (although some are more noticeable than others). Indeed, the 'other' category is the largest at 36% of all issues raised and gives some indication of the sheer diversity of issues arising on the news. This 'other' category ranged from alternative fuel policies to the role of the church in the dispute: intriguing but far too infrequently raised to make much of the individual counts.

The profiles shown in Graph 1 vividly demonstrate that the distribution of issues across channels was remarkably similar. Thus Channel 4 News, the Nine O'Clock News and News at Ten appeared to cover the same issues in roughly the same proportions. This suggests that the same criteria of newsworthiness, or news value, were present across all three channels. Indeed, it would be surprising if this were not the case since they represent human judgement, accredited estimations about what is or is not the news, and that judgement is one which is learnt over time in the process of being a journalist. News value is an occupational value for journalists and hence represents a shared understanding of what will and will not make the news. Before discussing these issues further, let us examine our survey data on public perceptions of what the strike was all about.

Putting the news in context. Audience perceptions of the issues

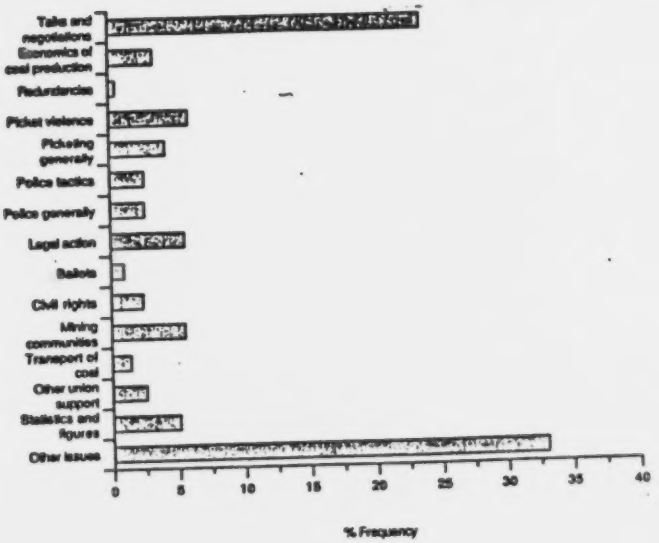
A frequency count of all the issues appearing in the news, of course, is inconclusive without some attempt to elucidate how the news message is received by audiences. Much mass communications research hitherto has concentrated on the nature of the messages rather than the interpretations people place on them.

In this section we describe some of the audience's more global judgements about television news of the miners' strike. As with the content analysis of the news, a large array of issues in the miners strike were identified by the audience. Furthermore, there was an even spread of responses. No more than 18% of people nationally in August 1984 or 21% in March 1985 thought that any one single issue was most important.

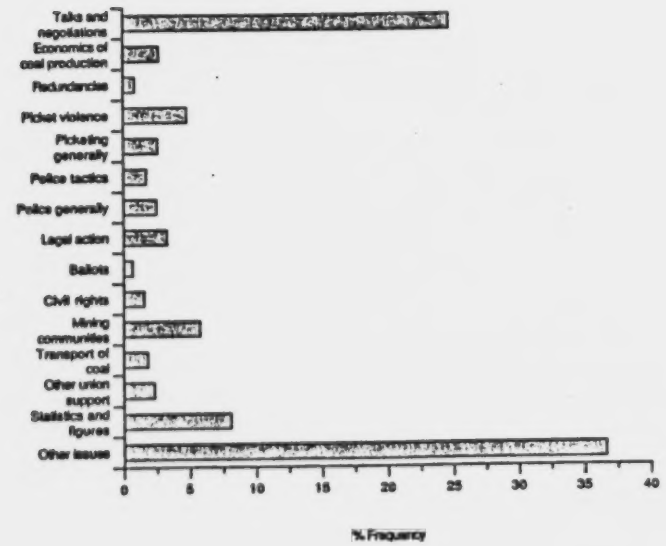
The question we asked was: "What do you think is the most important issue that the miners' strike has raised?" It is important to note that this was an open ended question where interviewers wrote down the public's spontaneous answers and responses to further prompts: "And what do you think is the next most important issue?". "And the next?". Had interviewees been offered a list or "show cards" of issues (as is more customary in survey work) there is no doubt that their replies would have been more constrained. Below is a summary of the most popular issues identified.

"What do you think is the most important issue that the miners' strike has raised?"

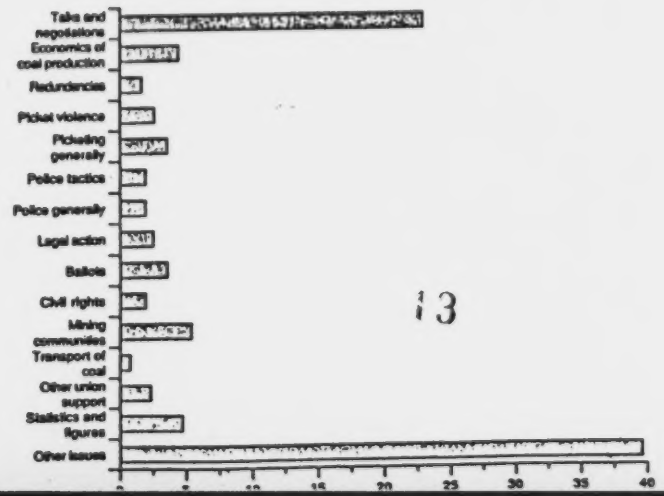
FREQUENCY OF ISSUES MENTIONED ON NINE O'CLOCK NEWS



FREQUENCY OF ISSUES MENTIONED ON NEWSNIGHT



FREQUENCY OF ISSUES MENTIONED ON CHANNEL FOUR NEWS



National Survey (all mentions)

Issues	August 1984	March 1985
	%	%
1 Picket violence	27	6
2 Pit closures/unemployment	25	25
3 Conflict of personalities	22	9
4 Intimidation/mass picketing	21	3
5 Who rules the country/union power	19	38
6 Ballots	14	8
7 Police behaviour/powers	13	4
8 Damage to other industries	10	4
9 (Un)economic pits	8	8
10 Damage to pits	6	4
11 Pay and conditions	4	3
12: Media coverage/bias	5	4
12: Inflation/fuel price rises	4	6
Others	77	64
Don't know	67	114
	---	---
	322	300

The perceived importance of issues as rated by the public was rather different from the frequency with which they arose in the news although we must note that qualitative judgements by audiences may not necessarily reflect quantitative amounts of coverage. Pit closures and redundancies was thirteenth in its frequency in the news, and yet judged by the public to be the second most important issue in the coal strike and was mentioned first most often. Additionally, talks and negotiations which predominated in the news were hardly ever mentioned by the public.

The causes of the dispute - the economics of coal production, pit closures and redundancies amounted to only 3.7% of the total coverage. Thus there was a powerful tendency for the news to emphasise the conduct of the strike rather than the causes of the dispute. News is event driven. As with war it is the movement and progress of the campaign and battles that are followed. The conduct eclipses the causes as the story moves on and violence on the picket line is easier to film than a pit closing.

The more political issue of "who rules the country" was increasingly perceived to be the most important issue, but was hardly ever mentioned on the news. "Personalities" provides a further anomaly being the third most important

issue identified by the public in August 1984 but hardly ever explicitly raised on television news.

The discrepancy between public perceptions of the important issues raised by the strike and the emphasis given by news coverage is even greater in the results from our survey of a Northern mining community in Castleford. Here, perhaps not surprisingly, a quarter (25%) of people saw the most important issue as mining communities and the future employment prospects in the area. What was also immediately apparent in the Castleford survey is the relatively small range of issues mentioned by people. A more general condemnation of Government actions was however, vigorously expressed by a substantial minority (21%). A common theme of this attack was the attitude of the Government in trying to crush the trade unions.

The third most important issue identified by Castleford residents was that of police tactics mentioned by 11% of the sample. The 'other' category at 19% included remarks about "split communities", "the democracy of the NUM", "privatisation of pits", "the courts", and a comment on "the media establishments as anti-working class".

The evidence suggests therefore that television news did not 'set the agenda' of important issues for the public in any crude sense. Although the results are not conclusive, it appears that frequency of appearance of issues or television news had little effect on the priority given by the general public to the issues. The above results cannot be taken as an unequivocal death blow to agenda setting theory. It must be noted that "talks and netotiations" and "statistics of the return to work" are quite different kinds of issues from the others - especially in the way they were treated in the news - appealing primarily as events in the history of the strike. Apart from these two issues

there is an element of concordance between what appears on the television and what people think. The prominence of picketing violence declined over time which echoes the declining importance which the public attached to it as an issue in the strike. However causality is, as ever, elusive. It is not possible to say whether television news has set the agenda which shapes public opinion, or whether other factors for example newspapers or radio influence both public and television views. In any case there is sufficient discrepancy in the data to cast doubt on simple models of effect or agenda setting functions of the media.

Popular views of the strike seem to have been based on a dynamic framework of attitudes and beliefs which structured the way in which the public understood what was happening in the dispute. Pre-existing attitudes which people brought to the miners strike included a fairly jaundiced view about unions. In our surveys 60% of those surveyed thought unions had too much power (against 9% who said not enough), while 65% agreed with the statement "trade unions these days are too political". Some 89% of people who thought unions had too much power also thought they were too political. Thus the refusal of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) to hold a national ballot (much discussed in the first two months of the strike) was inevitably seen as an abuse of its own internal power. Despite attempts by the union's president, Arthur Scargill, to explain the niceties of NUM procedures and rules, in our surveys, 92% of people thought that the union should have held a national ballot. Its failure to do so was probably the unions biggest single mistake in the battle for popular support. Only 10% of people nationally felt the miners were fully justified in taking strike action, 41% thought they were partly justified while 45% felt that they were not justified at all. The lack of a national ballot seems to have interferred with general acceptance that the strike was justified

These pre-existing public attitudes make it quite easy for the government of the day to raise the spectre of "who rules the country?" or - as the Prime Minister had it - "the enemy within" to shift attention from the strikers' arguments on to public concerns, to conflate the causes of a dispute with a political challenge. In this context it is worth remembering that the National Union of Mineworkers had brought down a previous Conservative Government (in 1974) over exactly this issue when it forced an election which the government lost.

Was the coverage adequate?

In the light of the discrepancy between people's perceptions of the strike and aspects of its television coverage. We asked:

> "Are there any aspects of the miners' strike which you think get too little coverage on television news?"

National Survey

	August 1984 Labour Voters %	Con. Voters %	August Total Sample %	March 1985 Total Sample %
Views of working miners	8	18	12	6
Views of miners' wives	12	4	8	6
What the strike is about/ pit closures	9	5	7	8
Negotiations between NUM and NCB	7	7	6	4
Others (all less than 6%)	34	38	37	36
None	30	28	30	40
	---	---	---	---
	100 (n=1079)	100	100 (n=245)	100

Only a small minority of people (8%) identified pit closures as receiving too little coverage. Although some interesting varieties of opinion existed clearly there is little evidence that the public thought the television news coverage to be inadequate. Indeed the opposite is the case. We asked:

"Do you think there has been too much news about the miners' strike on television, or too little, or has the amount been about right?"

National Survey

	Con		Lab		Total	
	Aug %	Mar %	Aug %	Mar %	Aug %	Mar %
Too Much	40	61	44	56	36	47
Too Little	5	1	3	1	9	1
About Right	52	36	51	41	53	46
Don't Know	3	2	1	2	2	5
	100	100	100	100	100	100

Aug n = 1079 Mar n = 295 (subsample)

Only a tiny minority of people (1%) at the end of the strike thought that it had received too little coverage. A slight difference existed between people who would vote Conservative and those who would vote Labour "if there was an election tomorrow". However when the same question was asked in our survey of 147 people in the mining community of Castleford, over seven times as many people (37%) thought there had been too little coverage of the strike.

In our content analysis news about the miners' strike was placed either first or second in the bulletin on 78% of occasions and in over half of the bulletins (52%) the miners' strike provided the lead story of the day.

Nevertheless "adequacy" is not the same as balance and we now turn to examine various measures we took of this.

Balance and bias: the portrayal of actors in television news

We would like to distinguish between news bias and news balance. Bias is a mental tendency towards a certain position, which is understandable for

viewers to have but unprofessional for broadcasters to show. Balance is the act of assessing the relative weight of ideas and opinions for inclusion in a news programme, which is only done by news broadcasters and should not be related to bias.

The detailed content analysis of television news programmes supports the notion that balance was usually achieved - although this was a balance of political voices (e.g. Government v's Opposition) rather than ideas (e.g. the right to work v's the right to strike). Furthermore a majority of public opinion was that neither the BBC news nor ITN was biased in its coverage of the strike.

These conclusions are not based upon one simple single question in either the content analysis or our survey: a variety of measures were employed. Let us expand on this: the main objective of these measures was to test various hypotheses about the treatment of both actors and of news information which have been generated by previous research. The unfortunate, but derstandable, tradition has arisen in original research where results which support a null hypothesis (a hypothesis of no difference between actors, issues or channels) are excluded from a presentation - only significant results are aired publicly. Indeed in the present research the null hypothesis was confirmed by most of the measures we used. Thus we can state that balance was usually achieved in the news and bias was not perceived by a majority of the audience.

There is, however, much more to the results than this, as we shall see in the next sections. Briefly stated when imbalance was highlighted by the content analysis it inclined towards favouring the coal board rather than the miners union and, when the public perceived some bias it was in the same direction.

Furthermore public opinions on the strike was clearly influenced by people's predispositions. For instance Labour voters were far more likely to judge the news to have been biased against the miners than Conservatives, but we shall go into this in more depth later.

In common with other surveys of public opinion on media bias generally (e.g. IBA 1985, MORI 1984), our survey showed around 60% of people considered the news to be impartial in its coverage of the strike. However, these aggregated responses mask the diversity of opinions hidden within "the public". For instance, although the majority of people nationally saw BBC news coverage as impartial, Labour voters were four times more likely to see the coverage as biased against the miners as were Conservative voters. This difference did not change much from August to March.

We do not wish, however, to equate the notion of bias entirely with that of variant perceptions. In fact our systematic analysis of news content indicates that the news cannot be described as totally balanced in its treatment of actors and events. Nonetheless our concern in this section is to explore the perception of bias among different groups of people. The questions we asked and the responses we obtained are given below:

> "Do you think that the BBC news has been biased in favour of the striking miners, or biased against them, or has it been impartial?"

National Survey

	Con		Lab		Total	
	Aug	Mar	Aug	Mar	Aug	Mar
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Biased in favour of miners	9	6	3	3	5	4
Biased against miners	8	8	32	32	17	18
Impartial	66	65	45	45	58	56
Never Watch	3	7	3	5	3	8
Don't Know	13	14	15	15	16	15
	100	100	100	100	100	100

Aug n = 1079
Mar n = 245

A similar pattern of responses were given when the public were asked about ITV news.

"Is ITV news biased in favour of the striking miners, or biased against them, or is it impartial?"

National Survey

	Con		Lab		Total	
	Aug	Mar	Aug	Mar	Aug	Mar
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Biased in favour of miners	7	9	5	4	5	6
Biased against miners	5	5	25	37	14	19
Impartial	67	63	52	42	58	56
Never Watch/Don't Know	21	22	19	16	23	18
	100	100	100	100	100	100

Aug n = 1079 Mar n = 245

Most people felt that both BBC and ITV news had been impartial but Labour voters were at least 4 times more likely to see the news as biased against the miners than were Conservatives. This phenomenon of individual differences in perceptions is consistent throughout all the questions we asked. It seems as though people tend to assimilate new information into their existing conceptual framework. Thus news activates latent predispositions and is interpreted according to the rules of these predispositions.

Perceptions of bias seem to be mediated by political preferences more than any other single variable that we have measured. It is notable that more Labour voters saw ITV news as biased when questioned in March 1985 than in August 1984. This difference over time was not evident in opinion on the BBC's news. Although there seems no obvious explanation for this the result may have something to do with Labour voters being more likely to watch ITV news than BBC and the public discussion of media bias may well have heightened perceptions of bias in the intervening period. People in Castleford saw things rather differently. Overwhelmingly they thought that TV news was biased against the miners, 73% thought so of BBC and 67% of ITV.

Of course more generally the close involvement of many people in Castleford with the strike may mean that they were particularly sensitive to any perceived misrepresentation of the miners or their views in the television coverage. However, it would be naive to suppose that those embroiled in the dispute have access to the "reality" of the entire dispute and were thus better able to judge any discrepancy between what was shown on the news and what really happened. People close to the events must judge news portrayal from a basis grounded in experience of the locality, they know much about the history and the development of circumstances which lead up to the news event. For them it all forms part of a continuing story with historical antecedents which, even as it happens, is being assimilated into their local culture. Any portrayal of an event squeezed into five or ten minutes of television news cannot hope to correspond entirely to their own complex analysis of the situation and must seem woefully inadequate. Perhaps it is not surprising that locals prefer their own version of events based on an evolving situation rather than the compact description offered on the news.

When a person's idea of the strike comes into conflict with what is presented on television, we should expect that people prefer their own version. For example, the person on the receiving end of a single truncheon blow might well define a scuffle as very violent. If that blow is not reflected on or somehow represented in the news, then the victim might easily suppose that there is a politically motivated blindness to police malpractice. However, organisational and practical restrictions are present in filming outside broadcasts - they cannot be expected to film every incident. One news reporter told us - "I had one camera crew to cover over a hundred sites that could be newsworthy". Additionally, another reporter who covered the strike extensively told us that any violence from whatever source on the picket line was so frighteningly compelling that to avoid filming it happening would have been impossible.

Camera Location: audience and content comparison

The differences in perceptions of the news outlined above are made concrete and illustrated in a more tangible way when we look at the actual location of cameras in outside broadcasts and compare this with people's perceptions of the location. The position of the cameras in filming tense or violent scenes has been said to impart a greater sense of emphathy in the viewer for one side rather than another. For this reason we included camera placement as a variable in our content analysis. The table below shows the location of the camera in outside broadcasts broken down by channel. Although for the most part the cameras were either centrally located, or moving around, they were nevertheless over four times more frequently behind police lines than

behind those formed by the pickets. This tendency to be located behind police lines was more pronounced on News at Ten than in the Nine O'Clock News. Overall the image on television of the physical dispute was literally more often from the policeman's eye-view of events than the miners'.

Camera Location in Picket Line Scenes

Content Analysis

	Nine O'Clock News	News at Ten	Total
	%	%	%
Behind Police Lines	26	35	31
Behind Picket Lines	5	9	7
In between/moving	64	36	50
In the air above both	1	8	4
None of above	4	12	9
	100	100	100

(n = 365)

Returning to our audience research we asked:

"In picket line scenes on television, where do you think the news camera has been most of the time?"

National Survey

	Voting Labour	Voting Conservative	Total
	%	%	%
Behind police lines	37	19	30
Behind picket lines	12	6	9
Inbetween/moving about a lot	45	61	53
In the air above both	-	1	1
Don't know	6	14	8
	100	100	100

(n = 245)

It would be wrong to assume that the correspondence between perceptions

of location and actual location is good evidence for the public's ability to judge the position of cameras. The evidence does not allow this conclusion. We recorded where the cameras were on every film clip shown from the picket line, and found that they were in between or moving on 50% of occasions. We asked where people thought the camera was most of the time. Slightly more than half of the public were correct.

As we have come to expect, major disagreements existed between Labour and Conservative voters about the perceived positions of cameras. Far more Labour supporters judged the cameras to have been behind the police lines. It would seem reasonable to infer, therefore, that the higher sympathy for the miners amongst Labour voters is implicated in their selective memory for cameras being on the police "side" of events. Similarly, lack of sympathy might have influenced Conservatives to remember the news selectively, a process given further support by the results of our Castleford survey.

Castleford Survey

	Striking Miners Not Pickets	Pickets	Not Miners	Total
	%	%	%	%
Behind police lines	83	89	64	76
Behind picket lines	4	4	7	5
In between/moving about a lot	13	7	28	18
In the air	-	-	2	1
	100	100	100	100

(n = 147)

Here 76% thought the cameras to have been behind police lines most of the time on television. Of those miners directly involved with picketing, 89% considered the cameras were behind police ranks most often. What these data seem to show us is a pronounced tendency for people to remember selectively what they see.

A myth about cameras always being behind police lines seems to have developed in other discussions of the miners' strike. Thus, Michael Crick, the Channel 4 News journalist and producer, also had the impression that filming occurred almost exclusively from the police territory:

> "Television crews do film picket lines nearly always from the police side - tending only to show pickets attacking police ..." (Granta 15 Spring 1985).

Our research shows that at least judging from broadcast film, crews were not "nearly always" filming from the police side but were most often moving about or centrally located. However Crick is correct in suggesting that there was a marked tendency to be behind police lines more often than picket lines. Again Michael Crick offers a plausable explantation for this preference:

> "because crews on the pickets side are jostled, spat at and often filming is prevented. The intense hostility makes getting a fair picture difficult and each time we fail, the pickets get more and more hostile ... even the NUM's own video team had been attacked ... and sometimes we're physically attacked ... At an NUM rally in Mansfield an ITN technician is forced to the ground and urinated on by eight drunken miners."

Possibly the reason for this intense hostility directed usually at cameramen and technicians is because they are the most visible media people around. The newspaper journalist is able to mingle relatively freely without being identified. The hostility some pickets felt towards the media establishment, especially the more vitriolic of the tabloids, may well have been directed at TV crews out of frustration and for want of a better target. If the camera

crews more frequently film from behind the police ranks, at least part of the responsibility must rest with the pickets for putting them there. Additionally, at the start of the strike camera crews were corralled by police into positions away from the action. Furthermore as the strike went on cameramen may well have voluntarily retreated behind police lines for their own protection in anticipation of violence. Our content analysis data seems to support this idea. When we examined the sample of bulletins which portrayed only violent picket scenes the camera was far more likely to be behind the police lines.

Content Analysis

Camera Position	Violent Picket Line scenes %	Other picket line scenes %
Behind police lines	31	8
Behind picket lines	1	1
Aerial view	1	2
Central view or wide pan	62	78
None of above	5	11
Total %	100	100

Thus when picket line scenes contained violence, cameras were almost four times more likely to be behind police lines and this offers some explanation for the overall bias noted earlier.

Interview Style - audience and content comparison

The placement of cameras is one more fairly obvious visual influence on the way a news story is portrayed. What is also important in terms of presentation is the manner in which the participants themselves are handled. We examined how all of the actors were interviewed. After controlling for the difference in the number of appearances Arthur Scargill was almost four times

as often interviewed in a critical fashion than Ian MacGregor. The judgement of whether an interview was critical, neutral or supportive was based on key phrases used. For example, "Isn't that unreasonable...", "But surely..." were taken as critical, "That's a good point...", "I see", etc, were taken as examples of a supportive interview. The results were clear:

Content Analysis

Style of Interviewer	MacGregor	Other NCB Reps	Scargill	Other NUM Reps	Strikers	Workers
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Critical	8	19	31	15	11	0
Neutral	82	77	67	81	86	80
Supportive	10	4	2	4	3	20
Total %	100	100	100	100	100	100
No. of Cases	40	26	61	47	37	30

The interview style of the interviewer with actors.

These phrases not only indicate that Scargill was subject to more criticism, but also that the interviewer was defining Scargill as being outside the normally accepted realm of reasoning - "Isn't it unreasonable to say..." and so on. The interviewer refers by implication to a body of reason or common sense which is assumed to be shared by the audience.

One explanation for this, as has been suggested, is that the difference is simply due to the different personalities - that MacGregor could not easily be interviewed critically, since he would simply dry up and that there was little chance of this happening to Scargill since he responds well to sharper questioning. In this context it is worth remembering the historical circumstances of Trade Unionism. Scargill's particular qualities, the ability to withstand sharp questioning and to be articulate in the face of adversity,

were probably helpful in his becoming president of the NUM, and seem an important factor in his high level of rank and file support. Scargill has also been able to voice a growing concern in the Trade Union movement as to the "bias of the media". MacGregor's career on the other hand, did not demand the same 'knock about' verbal skills. In short, it is unlikely to be mere coincidence which dictates that the two figureheads have the types of personality which we see on screen. One could not imagine them in each other's job!

A second explanation, offered by a number of news reporters, is that the media were feeling their way with the 'new man' MacGregor, who after all had only been chairman of the coal board since September 1983. In contrast Scargill was very much a known entity with whom the media had a great deal of experience, and vice-versa. But how did viewers judge the interviews? We asked:

"Would you say that television interviewers tend to be critical or supportive of Mr Scargill?"

National Survey

	Labour voters	Cons. voters	Total	Castleford
	%	%	%	%
Very/Fairly critical	77	52	62	82
Neutral	15	28	25	9
Fairly/Very supportive	4	12	7	9
Don't Know	4	6	5	0
	100 (n = 245)	100	100	100 (n = 147)

The same question, but this time with reference to MacGregor, was also put to the public.

	Labour voters	Cons. voters	Total	Castleford
	%	%	%	%
Very/Fairly critical	21	30	29	27
Neutral	35	36	35	8
Fairly/Very supportive	28	20	22	62
Don't Know	16	14	14	3
	100 (n = 245)	100	100	100 (n = 147)

The differences between the two sets of data are dramatic. Interviews with Scargill were far more likely to be seen as critical than were interviews with MacGregor. Additionally a clear difference in perception was again present between the political divide of Conservative and Labour voters. Labour voters were more likely to see the interviewer's style of questioning as supportive of MacGregor and critical of Scargill. What appears to be at work therefore is a political disposition that registered the questioning of Scargill as hostile, and which by the same token registered the questioning of MacGregor as supportive. The same phenomenon is to be found in the residents of Castleford, but is even more marked.

Any claim that television news coverage of the strike was neutral in its handling of the two main participants is not supported by this evidence. Whatever reasons might be given for the difference in the adopted style of interview there is no question that the approach when interviewing with Scargill was more critical than that used with MacGregor. It is without doubt a classic case of what can be termed systematic (whether intentional or not), as opposed to random bias. For those concerned with the central tenets of television news - fairness, impartiality and balance - it is a disturbing result, and one that was not lost on the viewing audience. Indeed, in this case such perception was not limited to Labour voters, Conservative voters were also more likely than not to consider interviewers to be more critical of

Scargill than MacGregor. The fact that residents of Castleford were even more likely to perceive this bias in interview style shows that predispositions were in some way at play in judging content, but there is no escaping the general spread of concern at the way the interviews were conducted. A strong conclusion can be drawn at this point. News interviews were biased as objectively measured and biased as subjectively perceived.

Nevertheless the story is incomplete, and the following sections will introduce some important caveats to the conclusions outlined above.

Use of figures and statistics

Aside from the issues raised and the actors appearing in the news, there is another matter which constituted an important part of the coverage of the strike, that of figures and statistics. These are not necessarily neutral, objective facts, but depending on the way they were compiled and presented could be partisan. For example:

> "Eight hundred striking miners go back to work: a record says the Coal Board". BBC Nine O'Clock News 5.11.84

The presentation of figures and statistics pertaining to the number of pits or miners working or striking was used by the media as a daily indicator of the success or failure of the strike. But did the "drift back to work" (which was said to herald the end of the strike) predominate or did the news focus on pits remaining closed or workers still on strike or were these views balanced?

Our analysis showed coverage described the situation as pro-NCB (ie: in terms of pits open or miners working) some two and a half times more often than as pro-NUM (ie: in terms of pits closed or miners on strike) (372 vs 155 times). When this is broken down by channel it is evident that the BBC was even more inclined than ITN to present what was essentially a pro NCB perspective.

While a number of news journalists complained to us that they simply could not get NUM figures - either the NUM headquarters' 'phones were always engaged, or when they got through the statements were simply to deny the Coal Board figures - the criticisms of Michael Crick still stand:

> "Some journalists don't bother to attribute the figures to the board (ITN is one of the exceptions) and most have generally adopted the Board's phrase 'the drift back' despite its suggestion of a continuous and inevitable process". (Granta 15 Spring 1985)

It is surely insufficient to say, for example:

> "Another 850 miners return to work today"
> (BBC Nine O'Clock News 7.11.84)

without giving the viewer comparable information about the number on strike, or even in some cases, attributing the figures to the Coal Board.

The use of graphics when figures were presented visually is particularly interesting in this instance. At the beginning of the strike the BBC often used the term "idle" and "working" pits, with the former's emotive implications of laziness and wastage, and the latter's more positive, literally productive connotations. In time this changed to "shut down" and "working" and eventually to "working normally and "closed".

Television and the Miners' Strike

In this final section we review what seems to us some of the more important points raised by our research.

While 6 out of ten (59%) of those surveyed thought there had been too much coverage of picketing violence somewhat surprisingly only 7% thought there had been too little coverage of the economics of coal production. Perhaps a clue to this is given by consideration of documentaries and current affairs programmes. Throughout the strike inspiration for these programmes was increasingly found in the dispute. In the first six months there were 12 programmes broadcast dealing with the strike, but during its last six months a further 27 were shown, eight of which appeared in the final month of March 1985.

These programmes covered a variety of issues and given the small sample size (N = 39) some caution should be exercised in interpreting trends. However, the main finding was that these programmes had quite different concerns to those indicated in the news. Those issues which had predominated in the news - 'talks and negotiations' and 'picketing violence' received little attention (3 programmes and 2 programmes respectively). On the other hand, issues which seemed somewhat

neglected on the news featured largely in documentaries - for example, the economics of coal production was covered by 11 programmes, eclipsed only by 'mining communities' which provided the focus for 12 programmes. The only other topic to receive notable attention in documentaries or current affairs was 'the police' covered by 11 which were programmes mainly broadcast fairly early in the strike (only 1 occurred in the last 3 months of the dispute).

Thus, although the sample is small, the issues covered certainly confirm the statement cited earlier by Alan Protheroe (Assistant Director-General of the BBC):

> "our news is intended as immediate coverage of issues of the day: our current affairs output complements the news coverage by offering the kind of background explanation and analysis that is impossible within the time constraints of brief news bulletins and summaries".

A clean bill of health therefore? Not quite. Although the majority of the general public were of the opinion that the news coverage of the strike had been unbiased, in our main survey, those who thought that news was biased against the miners heavily outnumbered those who thought it favoured them (by over 3:1 in the case of the BBC and the ITN).

Thus current affairs are not a palliative to bias but only a palliative to lack of depth in the news. In our content analysis we identified a number of sources of bias, especially in the critical interviewing of Arthur Scargill. We found he was four times more likely to be interviewed critically than Ian MacGregor. Moreover, the general public perceived this too - whereas almost a third (29%) felt that MacGregor

was interviewed very or fairly critically, two thirds (62%) thought this true of Scargill. Various journalists have attempted to justify their role in this to us, but the question should remain for debate - should interviewers treat all interviewees equally in order to demonstrate due impartiality?

Perhaps one of the most intriguing trends in our research has been the demonstration of consistent differences in public perceptions of the news associated with people's predispositions. This was not confined to attitudes to the strike where, for example, only 4% of Conservatives were very sympathetic to the strike compared with 37% of Labour voters. Predispositions affected perceptions of bias where, for example, Labour voters were four times more likely than Conservatives to perceive the BBC as biased against the strike. More than this predispositions distorted judgements of more easily verifiable aspects of the strike - for example Labour voters were more inclined to judge camera angle to have been mainly behind police lines in picketing scenes. Our results showed that while camera angle was usually between both pickets and police, filming was four times more likely to be behind police lines than picket lines. However, cameras were most likely to retreat behind police lines when violence occurred.

Our attempts to tease out differences between channels proved somewhat frustrating. Small differences did exist but these were not very illuminating and certainly did not offer much in the way of explanation for the high praise given to Channel 4's coverage. However, some of the differences may explain some of the strong feeling - especially in Castleford - about the coverage by the BBC. Of special importance was the 'strike prognoses' offered which we classified quite simply as pro-

NCB or pro-NUM. On the BBC 7% of 'prognoses' were pro-NUM compared with 4% on ITN or 8% on Channel 4. More tellingly pro-NCB prognoses accounted for 34% of all BBC prognoses but only 16% of ITN's and 21% of Channel 4's. These prognoses were compounded by the relatively greater use of references to pits/miners working rather than to pits closed/on strike. The ratio of these for the three channels was: BBC - 9:1; ITN - 6:4; Channel 4 - 8:2.

Here, and on a number of measures, Channel 4 seems midway between ITN and BBC. This is not to say that Channel 4 was not different. For example, one result appears at first puzzling - BBC and ITN devoted roughly equal amounts of their news space to the miners' strike at 16%. Channel 4 devoted only 11% however while this is proportionally less, this was relatively more in time than the other channels since Channel 4 news last 50 minutes compared with 25 minutes for both News at Ten and the Nine O'Clock News.

While the rank order of issues covered on the three channels was almost idential, where differences occured with Channel 4 they were in the direction approved of by pro NUM repondents such as in Castleford. Thus, picketing violence received less coverage in Channel 4 (2.6%) than it did on ITN (4.8%) or BBC (6%). Moreover, the economics of coal production/redundancies received proportionally more coverage on Channel 4 (6% against 3.6% for ITN and 3.9% for BBC).

If Channel 4 news was seen as 'different' by striking miners' this may have been more by contrast with BBC news. Possibly part of the praise for Channel 4 news could result from other Channel 4 programmes, several of which were very pro strike and a more general feeling that Channel 4

as a medium was different and pro minorities. It is worth remembering that favourable responses to Channel 4 were made early in the strike.

Reports that camera crews from both the BBC and ITN were displaying Channel 4 stickers became a joke within months (the humour is that Channel 4 news uses ITN crews). Thus, perhaps part of the explanation for the 'Channel 4 phenomenon' might lie in the particular attention BBC made to picketing violence at the beginning of the strike.

Perhaps the answer to the question of why Channel 4 news was considered "fairer" by many of those on the trade union side lies in its more discursive and detailed style of presentation, a factor which we did not directly explore in the content analysis. Insofar as Channel 4 news took the time to analyse explore and explain issues, it is likely that its account would come closer to the understandings of those involved in the dispute, whereas an account crammed into a shorter period could not.

SUMMARY

Our research produced a mass of data from which simple summaries appear misleading. However, there are patterns in the data which allow us to reach a number of conclusions.

* First of all, throughout the strike there was a tendency for the news to emphasise the conduct of the strike - the epiphenomenon of union ballots, talks and negotiations and picketing violence - rather than the causes or of the dispute. Thus the economics of coal production amounted to only 2.5% of the issues raised, while pit

closures and redundancies accounted for a mere 1.2% This is hardly surprising given the event driven nature of news. As with war, it is the movement and progress of campaigns and battles that are followed. The conduct eclipses the causes as the story moves on. Violence on a picket line is easier to represent visually on the news than a pit closing down.

* Secondly concerns that the media set the agenda for public perceptions of issues are not supported by our data. There was little correspondence between what the general public thought were the most important issues raised by the strike and the frequency with which those issues appeared in television news.

* Thirdly, there was little consensus on what issues had been underplayed on television news. Only a tiny minority of people thought there was too little coverage of "what the strike was all about"/pit closures" (7% nationally in August 1984 and 8% in March). However the public overwhelmingly thought that violence in the strike had received too much coverage.

* Fourthly while the results of the content analysis and the public opinion surveys support the notion that "balance" was usually achieved, where deviations occurred these were consistent and provide grounds for some concent that the miners cause received less favourable treatement than that of the NCB. Moreover "balance" did not seem to operate as a methodological device for ensuring truth but more as a mechanism for political safety. Thus reasonable balance was achieved of the 'political' voices of government and opposition, NUM and NCB, but balance of ideas (such as the right to work - versus the right to strike) was less evident.

* A fifth point qualifies the above notes on bias. While 'balance' was not always achieved internally in the news the review of current affairs and documentaries shows that deficiencies in the news were compensated for by other programmes. However we would argue that current affairs and documentaries should be a palliative to lack of depth in the news and not to the existence of bias.

* Our sixth point is our most important one that bias is as much a characteristic of the viewer as an inherent feature of the news. Thus throughout the data we found evidence that predispositions determined perceptions and judgements of the strike and the news coverage of it. Labour voters were four times more likely to think the BBC was biased against the miners than were Conservatives, while in March 1985 they were seven times more likely to judge the ITN as having been biased against the miners than were Conservatives.

Finally, the long-term consequences of the strike were identified by actors and commentators alike as being entirely negative. This was a view shared by the general public where no one could see any positive outcome to the dispute. While television can hardly be held responsible for the conflict which it must reflect - in the case of the miners' strike only 2% of people thought it had made a settlement to this particular conflict easier. In this strike there were no winners.

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